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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/FO (AMB MQUINN), SA/A, S/CR, SA/PAB,  
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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG  
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND  
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: PRT/HELMAND HELMAND WOMEN PROVINCIAL  
COUNCIL MEMBERS SPEAK OUT

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: Helmands four women Provincial  
Council members are taking on a substantial role.

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Helmands recently installed Governor Daoud meets  
with the Council regularly; the women members views  
are considered. The Council, women included, meets  
daily with citizens. The women members are hearing  
many complaints about the lack of rights and  
opportunities for women, and corruption. They are  
serving as a conduit for womens issues, bringing  
them to the attention of the Governor. Citizens are  
also concerned about opium cultivation, but the  
general views are, if there will be eradication, it  
needs to be done fairly and farmers need  
compensation. PRT officials told the Council  
members that the Governors eradication plan is  
taking this into account. END SUMMARY.

2.(SBU) The four women Provincial Council  
members, Raazia Baluch, Shirina Barakzai, Reza Gul,  
and Salima Sharifi, met with PRTOFF and PRT  
Commander on February 1. As a whole, the women  
members are well educated. All have finished at  
least 12 years of school. By contrast, only about  
five male members are educated.

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3.(SBU) IN THE MIX: The four Council members are  
relatively satisfied with their role since the  
Council organized in November. Overall, their views  
as a group or individuals are considered. They  
participate fully in the weekly meeting with  
Governor Daoud and they noted that the Governor  
solicits their opinions on a number of issues.

4.(SBU) WOMENS RIGHTS A LONG WAY TO GO: Reza  
Gul spoke about the lack of opportunities and rights  
for women. Women desperately need more educational  
and health services. In many cases, women are  
unable to utilize the services that are available  
because their families do not allow them to leave  
the house. Reza said that, as Helmand develops, she  
hoped this situation would improve, but Afghanistan  
took many steps backward during the 25 years of war;  
the situation for women may improve, but it will be  
a long and slow process.

5.(SBU) CORRUPTION, CORRUPTION, CORRUPTION: While  
not specifically a gender issue, the complaint that  
that  
the Council is hearing the most is public sector  
corruption. According to the women members, people  
have no faith that the provincial government is  
interested in helping them or bringing services to  
them. People are convinced that officials main  
concern is personal enrichment. The Council has  
discussed this with the Governor. He has asked all  
the Council members to visit some provincial offices  
and report back to him with their impressions on how  
well the offices are functioning, with an emphasis  
on looking out for obvious corruption.

6.(SBU) Concerning corruption, Reza cited an  
example to illustrate the women members engagement.  
A woman came to the Council to complain about being  
unable to reclaim her land near Gereshk, despite  
having all her documents in order. Reza brought the  
issue to the attention to the Governor, who ordered  
the district chief to ensure that the woman received  
her land. However, corruption again played a  
negative role. According to Reza, the district  
ct  
chief is involved in the land issue; the Governor  
has said that he will follow up to reach closure on

this case. Shirina added that this demonstrated perfectly why ordinary citizens had no faith in their local officials.

7.(SBU) OPIUM POPPY ERADICATION, BUT NOT WITHOUT COMPENSATION: The women members said that opium is not one of the top subjects among the constituents who come to see them, although they personally believe that Helmands poppy should be eradicated. The women stipulated, however, that the eradication be done fairly and the poor farmers receive compensation. They recounted how the last eradication effort was rife with corruption, with police taking money meant for farmers and extorting more from other farmers to avoid eradication. The PRT commander explained that the Governor has a plan that takes these issues into account, including components to implement cash for work and/or food for work programs to prevent impoverishing the countryside.

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8.(SBU) COMMENT: The women members of the Helmand Provincial Council appear to be holding their own. They are engaged with local citizens, with a natural focus on womens issues. That the Governor is considering their opinions is encouraging; using them to investigate provincial offices could provide valuable information. At the very least, it gives the women members an opportunity to become engaged in governance. END COMMENT.

9.(U) Dushanbe minimize considered.

NEUMANN